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## Special Analysis

### USSR: President's Legacy

President Brezhnev's death at age 75 after 18 years as head of the Soviet party and five as head of state has significant implications for Soviet policy. He wielded less personal power than any of his predecessors, but at least until recently, he was the regime's pivotal figure, the primary architect of policy, and the chief arbiter of differences within the Politburo. Brezhnev's departure will evoke little emotional response from the largely apolitical Soviet population. The leadership will move rapidly to name his immediate replacement as party leader, but his demise will accelerate policy debate already under way in the Kremlin. Brezhnev's chief legacy is an ambitious program of military spending that helped the USSR attain unprecedented power and influence both in absolute terms and relative to the US, but which is increasingly difficult for the economy to support.

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In the immediate aftermath of Brezhnev's death, collective restraints on his successor's power will inhibit the new leader's ability to deal forcefully with the critical economic situation. Soviet policy across the board will be less predictable. The resolution of leadership debate over many issues, however, may await the outcome of the power struggle, which could be prolonged. As a new leader consolidates his position, prospects of significant policy changes will increase.

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### Economic and Social Problems

Brezhnev's death comes at a time when Soviet economic prospects are gloomier than at any time since Stalin died in 1952. Since the mid-1970s, economic stringencies have increased, and GNP is currently growing at its lowest rate since World War II. This slowdown has called into question Brezhnev's economic strategy.

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Brezhnev sought to ensure popular quiescence by providing incremental improvements in material well-being, while dealing harshly with dissidents among the intelligentsia and with the national minorities. The slowing

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of economic growth, however, by making it difficult to continue to raise living standards, has increased dissatisfaction in Soviet society. This mood manifests itself in such ways as the growing consumption of alcohol and has contributed to a sharp decline in the growth of labor productivity. [REDACTED]

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Despite the pressing need for new approaches to ameliorate economic problems, however, the very complexity of these issues will make it difficult for the post-Brezhnev leadership to unite on a new approach. Moreover, the lack of slack in the economy reduces the leadership's leeway in dealing with the most distressed sectors. Any significant reorientation of economic priorities would involve painful trade-offs between investment, military spending, and consumption. [REDACTED]

#### Limitations on the Successor's Power

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Brezhnev's replacement will have less power than any previous party leader to push through his own programs, at least initially. Brezhnev's era represented an informal institutionalization of decisionmaking processes that put limits on the party leader's freedom of action. Moreover, the new party leader will not inherit even the full measure of Brezhnev's power. [REDACTED]

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In previous successions, the Politburo did not readily submit to the successor's attempts to assume his predecessor's full authority. None of the contenders for Brezhnev's job has had the range of experience that would give him a persuasive claim to succeed on the strength of credentials and political following. In these circumstances, the new party head will almost certainly be denied the state presidency, and other actions to dilute his authority are possible. [REDACTED]

#### Prospects for Policy Change

How different leaders will line up in forthcoming policy debates cannot be foreseen with any confidence, because opportunism is likely to prevail over any desire for consistency. As they maneuver for political advantage and attempt to win allies, Politburo members will not necessarily refrain from attacking policies they previously

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supported. Brezhnev himself may not escape the fate that befell Stalin, Khrushchev, and most other former heads of Communist regimes and may be blamed posthumously for the policy shortcomings of his incumbency. [REDACTED]

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It is improbable that the post-Brezhnev regime will scale down its foreign policy ambitions significantly in the near term because of internal problems. Increased debt and long-term hard currency shortages could affect the level of Moscow's economic commitments to client regimes in the Third World and could make Moscow more reluctant to take on major new economic burdens like those it has in Cuba or Angola. [REDACTED]

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The military will probably retain its effective veto over many aspects of national security policy. During Brezhnev's tenure, the military's prestige and influence expanded along with the expansion of the country's international role, as was made manifest in the elevation of the Defense Minister to full membership on the Politburo in 1973. In addition, the military hierarchy's weight in policy deliberations has traditionally been especially strong during succession periods. [REDACTED]

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Brezhnev's address to the military last week suggested that economic investment priorities have been a subject of recent debate. This subject was certain to be a primary issue at the Central Committee Plenum scheduled for next week, and it is a subject that a new leadership cannot escape. In the short term, however, new decisions on investment levels are not going to cause significant changes in living standards or economic performance. [REDACTED]

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Significant reforms, however, could well emerge in particular areas. Some economic reforms would be compatible with conservative social and political policies. In any event, although the precedent may not prevail, in previous successions the contender with the more "conservative" program has triumphed over the candidate advocating more "liberal" policies. [REDACTED]

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In the past, once the successor has secured his position, he has modified his program in a "liberal" direction substantially. Thus, Khrushchev adopted much of Malenkov's program--which concentrated on consumer goods, cut the military budget, and opened a dialogue with the US. Brezhnev, after establishing his authority, took over former Premier Kosygin's championship of detente with the US and his greater attention to consumer problems. [REDACTED]

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